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Mobilizing Black America

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MOBILIZING BLACK AMERICA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Human resources are the country's most precious asset. People mean power. In time of national emergency, we historically mobilized our citizenry to protect our national interests. However, we did not effectively utilize a significant fraction of our population during those times of national emergency. That significant fraction was black America.

U.S. defense planners have historically observed problems affecting the black community that have barred their from full participation in the defense of the country.

The paper in hand will document the government's long term concern with this problem. It consists of a review of previous defense and war department studies, observations and findings with respect to black mobilization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

What is mobilization? "Mobilization" is "the rapid assembly, production, or deployment of a superior force of military arms."¹ Harold J. Clem further defines mobilization when he writes:

To the average citizen, it [mobilization] means getting the Country ready to fight a war. It is the process by which the might of a nation is brought to a state of readiness for armed conflict, and includes assembling and organizing the personnel, materiel, supplies, and the relevant and key production facilities to achieve such state of readiness.

The United States (U.S.) grand strategy has always been based on protecting our national interests. When those interests were threatened, we mobilized for war. People (human resources) are the country's most precious asset, and remain an essential ingredient for the common defense. The U.S. must be able to call upon all its citizens to defend its interests.

U.S. defense planners have historically observed problems affecting the black community that have barred this significant fraction of America's population from full participation in the defense of the country. Many problems that plagued black America in the past still exist today. Further, new problems that did not

¹ Paul Bracklin, "Mobilization in The Nuclear Age" International Security 3 (Winter 1978-1979), p. 74

² Harold J. Clem, Mobilization Preparedness (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 1983), p. 1

exist in the past have exacerbated the situation. These problems were/are serious societal problems caused largely by institutional racism.

At this point one might question the significance of this topic with respect to the Industrial College. The significance is this: the Industrial College of The Armed Forces, an institution within the Department of Defense, has the mission to prepare selected military officers and civilians for senior leadership and staff positions by conducting post-graduate, executive-level courses of study and associated research dealing with the resource component of national power and its integration into national security strategy for peace and war. It is devoted to the effective and efficient mobilization of America's natural and human resources. It is fitting and proper then, from a purely mobilization standpoint that we at this institution again research the issue of black mobilization.

I say again because the Industrial College and also other senior service colleges and military historians have often studied the problem. Some studies were blatantly biased and only further perpetuated the racism of the time. Others, while reasonably objective and presenting solid recommendations, included no plan for the implementation of the recommendations. All these studies, beginning almost 70 years ago underscore this fact: America does not realize the full mobilization potential of its black citizens. The bottom line is: today problems affecting the mobilization of black America still exist, and unless

corrected will severely affect the country's overall mobilization efforts in the time of a national emergency. Given the country's downsizing of the military by more than 25 percent, and the reliance on the reserve components and reconstitution of the military in time of a national emergency, the country can ill afford not to have all citizens prepared for mobilization when called upon.

"Mobilizing Black America." addresses three interrelated areas:

- o a review of previous defense or war department studies, observations and findings with respect to black mobilization to gain a historical perspective and to apply any lessons learned to the problems of today.
- o an identification of current problems affecting the black community that contribute to a wasting of a major portion of America's human resources.
- o the development of solutions to identified problems, so that corrective action can be initiated and the squandering of this valuable asset stopped.

The paper in hand will document the government's long term concern with this problem. I will address five areas: study validity, problem identification, solutions recommended, interrelationships between studies, and where significant, the perennial nature of some problems.

BACKGROUND

Throughout our country's history, from colonial times to the present, black Americans have made increasingly important contributions to American combat capabilities. Black Americans saw their participation in America's struggles as a means to obtain full citizenship with equal rights. Unfortunately, this was not the case. America would continue turning to blacks in time of peril, accepting their aid, and then spurning them when the firing had stopped. This did not discourage them. When called upon to defend the country, blacks responded. When allowed to fight, blacks did so with distinction. Efforts to negate or deny their accomplishments and to discredit their service were undertaken for the purpose of minimizing their worth to the country and for perpetuating racism and the white supremacist mentality. This racism and white supremacist attitude substantially contributed to the War Department's inefficient and ineffective use of a significant portion of the country's population.

III. PREVIOUS STUDIES

As previously stated, the Department of Defense and senior service colleges have studied the issue of utilizing/mobilizing black Americans in times of national emergency, identifying problems within the race that affect their utilization. The Army War College conducted ten studies: the Industrial College of the

Armed Forces conducted one, and there were many studies conducted by the Air War College and the Air Command and Staff College.

It is important here to understand that most of the studies at these institutions addressed the utilization of blacks in a segregated military establishment. An establishment where almost all officers were white, and were usually written by whites who subscribed to and even supported the white supremacist mentality of the time. It is however, this supremacist mentality that obscures some of these studies, affecting, in my opinion, both the objectivity and accuracy of their findings. I will concede however, that areas identified in the studies that plague blacks, such as, economic status, health issues, sub-standard housing, and most of all, equal educational opportunities are accurate. These problems exist not because of some genetic inferiority in the race as some studies asserted, but because of inequitable treatment and shameful abuse of the black race by white America.

ARMY WAR COLLEGE STUDY # 127-25, 10 NOV., 1925
SUBJECT: EMPLOYMENT OF NEGRO MAN-POWER IN WAR.

Purpose: To develop a War Department policy on the use of Negro manpower in war.

Problem: Under the constitution, the Negro has rights as a citizen. He forms a considerable part of the United States population. It is evident that he must bear his share of the burden of war.

Primary Areas of Investigations: An analysis of the physical, mental, moral, psychological, and social qualities and characteristics of the Negro as a "sub-species" of the human family.

Summary of the Findings:

Physical: Based on World War I (WWI) statistics of the rejection of class I selective service registrants, the physical condition of the Negro was less than that of the white man. The southern negroes who form the bulk of the population had low endurance and stamina in cold rigorous climates. The report noted that his normal physical activity was generally small because of "laziness."

Mental: (a) Pure blood American Negroes allegedly were inferior to the white population in mental capacity. Negroes that showed marked mental attainment, also showed a heavy strain of white blood, the reporters argued. Negroes were decended from slaves imported from West Africa and were very "low on the scale of human evolution." The cranial cavity of the Negro is smaller

than the white, and his brain weighs 35 ounces contrast with 45 ounces for the white. (b) The fewest number of mentally crippled Negroes was found in the northern states, while the majority were found in the southern states. (c) All officers, without exception agreed that the Negro lacked initiative, displayed little or no leadership and could not accept responsibility.

Moral: As judged by white standards, the Negro was immoral. His ideas of honor and sex relations were not on the same plane with our white population. Petty thieveing, lying, and the lack of honesty was more common among Negroes than among whites. The Negro officer in WWI was a failure. He had not the fine points of honor which should characterize the American Army Officer.

Psychological: (Summarized) The Negro was profoundly superstitious, by nature subservient and believed himself to be inferior to whites. He was very susceptible to crowd influence. He had no leadership ability. He had not the physical courage of whites and could not control fear. He willingly accepted hard labor and therefore could be employed in labor battalions and non-combat branches. His state of mind bordered on resentment directed toward whites. The Negro's growing sense of importance made them more and more of a problem, and racial troubles could be expected to increase.

Social: The Negro's physical, mental, moral, and other psychological characteristics made it impossible for him to associate socially with any except the lowest class of whites. This social inequality made the close association of whites and blacks in a military organization impossible.

Recommendations of the War College:

(1) In the process of evolution, the American negro did not progressed as far as the other sub-species of the human family. As a race he did not developed leadership qualities. His mental inferiority and the inherent weaknesses of his character were factors that had to be considered with great care in the preparation of any plan for his employment in war. (2) In war neither the white man or the Negro should be given tasks they are not qualified to perform. However, the plan for the use of manpower should be fair to both races. (3) The Negro was a fair laborer, but a poor technician. As a fighter he was inferior to whites even when led by white officers. (4) The Negro officer was a failure in combat in WWI. However, the door should remain open for his development and training. (5) The largest Negro unit to be organized upon mobilization should be no larger than a battalion. (6) Negro soldiers as individuals would not be assigned to white units. (7) Negro combat units would be officered entirely by white officers, except in the grade of lieutenant. Only Negro officers who graduated from training camps would be assigned to these black combat units. (8) Negro

officers would not be placed over white officers, noncommissioned officers or soldiers.

Comment: This study says basically three things with respect to problems within the black population that bar them from the full participation in the defense of the country:

- (1) That racism and ignorance on the part of defense planners colored their objectivity in the formulation of a mobilization plan wasting a valuable human resource: the black race.
- (2) That the education system for blacks was poor, especially in the south, but made no recommendation for improvement.
- (3) That the health conditions of the blacks based on WWI registrants was poor, but made no recommendation for improvement.

This study supported Army racial segregation policy for the employment and utilization of blacks through WWII. After the war, the issue was studied again by the Army War College and others including the Air War College, the Air Command and Staff College, and The Industrial College of the Armed Forces based on lessons learned in WWII. The single biggest issue the studies dealt with was segregation and whether racial integration of the services was necessary from both a moral and resources standpoint. Studies from 1947 and beyond no longer stressed black congenital inferiority, but rather blamed whites for retarding Negro development. The post-WWII years were the racial turning point for the country. Some of the findings in the studies were tentative, hesitant, ambivalent, and ambiguous, but when measured

against reports and studies of the previous decade, these studies were positive.

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE/AIR UNIVERSITY STUDY, 1947.
SUBJECT: THE SEGREGATION OF NEGROES IN THE ARMY AIR FORCES.

This report was written by Colonel Noel F. Parrish. Colonel Parrish was the first person to study the subject of segregation after the war, and he clearly supported integration. He found that segregation was harmful to international relations, that the United States Navy and American industry had proven that integration could work, and that efficiency and justice demanded it. He wrote:

Compulsory segregation in the armed forces is an evasion of two simple facts. The facts are: Thirteen million Americans are classified by custom as Negroes; law and necessity confer upon these Negro Americans the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. Decency and justice may be ignored, as they often are, but the facts remain

There is no more obvious illustration of the rights and the responsibilities of citizenship than service in the Armed Forces. Any limitation on a man's equal right in the service of the nation tends to destroy the equality of his responsibilities

Segregation is the refusal to apply the American system to Negro individuals.

³ Alan L. Gropman, The Air Force Integrates, 1947-1964, (Washington: Office of Air Force History) p. 129

⁴ Colonel Noel F. Parrish, "The Segregation of Negroes in the Army Air Forces," (Air Command and Staff College/ Air University Study, 1947) pp 54, 59-60, 66, 93, 95, 100, and 101.

While Colonel Parrish's call for integration in the services was the clearest, there were others. Lt. Col Solomon Cruther in his Air Command and Staff College thesis wrote:

The armed forces of the United States cannot afford any doctrine based upon the premise of permanent racial superiority anymore, than they can afford to wage war with antiquated weapons.

Lt. Col. John B. Gaffney while a student at the Air Command and Staff College in 1948 called for the "gradual and eventual elimination of racial segregation." because the policy would lead to a more "effective utilization of all personnel."⁵ Another Student, Maj. Hugh D. Young wrote:

Certainly as a nation we have expended valuable energies in perpetuating the wasteful and sterile luxury of bi-racial institutions. we have actually wasted the human resources of Negro Americans by submitting them to relentless system frustration and rejection

⁵ Lt. Col. Solomon Cuther. Effective Utilization of Negro Personnel in the Armed Forces., (Air Command and Staff College Research Study, unpub., Mar 1948, Maxwell AFB Library) pp 22 and 23.

⁶ Lt. Col. John B. Gaffney. "Application of Personnel Mangement as Applied to Negro Troops in the Air Force," (Air Command and Staff College Research Study, unpb., Oct 1948, Maxwell AFB Library) pp 14-15.

⁷ Maj. Hugh D. Young. "Effective Utilization of Negro Manpower in the United States Air Force,"(Air Command and Satff College Research Study, unpb., Dec 1948, Maxwell AFB Library) pp 22-26.

INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE OF THE ARMED FORCES STUDY, 14 MAY, 1948
SUBJECT: TRAINING AND UTILIZATION OF MANPOWER.

Scope: The scope of the study was to conduct a critical examination of the problems involved in the utilization of manpower in war, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the methods and techniques used to meet these problems in World War II (WWII), and proposals for future procedures and controls.

Purpose: To obtain an understanding of the problems involved in the utilization of manpower and to make appropriate recommendations for future administration and control of manpower.

* NOTE: This report was a compilation of nine different committee reports. I will present and comment only on committee report No. 43, Section D, which is entitled the Negro. More than fifty percent of the total report was devoted to the Negro. The following statement appears in the introduction:

The Negro comprises approximately one-tenth of the population of the United States. Full utilization of this sizable portion of the population was not made during World War II. Any plan for a future emergency which does not encompass the full utilization of the Negro would neglect this large portion of the strength of the Nation.

8 The Industrial College of the Armed Forces Student Committee Report, Training and Utilization of Manpower, (Washington D.C., 1947-48) p. 1

The report focused on these items:

o Vital Statistics

- o Racial Prejudice, Discrimination and Law
- o Economic Status
- o Housing
- o Educational Deficiencies
- o Health
- o Utilization in The Armed Forces
- o Environmental and Transitional Characteristics
- o Armed Forces Policies
- o Segregation

Summary of the Findings-

Vital Statistics, Health, Housing, and Economic Status (Findings

36-43.

-- The health standard of the Negro in the United States was relatively low. The Negro death rate was 71 percent higher than white.

-- The Negro formed an important segment of our national manpower pool, and was important that steps be taken to bring their standards up to at least the white level.

-- The three main reasons for the general low health of the Negro were:

- Lack of adequate medical facilities
- Lack of Negro physicians / medical personnel
- Low economic status contributing to a low standard of living (substandard housing, overcrowding, bad sanitation and poor nutrition)

- Federal aid for public health programs was essential
 - More Negro doctors were required to care for their own people. The immediate answer was not one of providing more Negro medical schools, or of removing racial discrimination bias at white medical schools, however, but rather one of first doing something to improve the quality of Negro elementary and secondary school education.

Education Deficiencies (Findings# 30-35)

- The educational opportunities for the Negro in the United States were substandard, particularly in the South.
- Negro educational inequities were greater in the South. Because the cost of equalizing educational opportunities was prohibitive for local and state governments, and federal financial assistance appeared to be the only plausible answer.
- The low educational level of the Negro could have serious consequences for the country during times of national emergency. Corrective measures were necessary to prevent a large loss of effective manpower.

Racial Prejudice, Discrimination and Law (Findings # 27 & 29)

-- The feeling that the Negro was an inferior product of humanity and unfit to associate with the white population was nourished by many.

-- The Negro shared the housing disabilities of other low income groups and discrimination in one form or another limited the supply of housing available to him.

Environmental and Transitional Characteristics (Finding # 47)

-- Because Negroes were undereducated and underprivileged, they had developed undesirable traits of character, that in general disqualified them for leadership and rendered them ineffective as a unit in combat. These were:

- Low standards of achievement
- Lack of a pride of accomplishment
- Lack of a sense of pride
- Low technical knowledge and skills
- "Uncle Tom" complex

Other serious obstacles to full utilization of the Negro in the services were the attitudes, traditions, habits and antipathies that existed between the white and Negro races.

Armed Forces Policies (Finding # 48)

- The Armed Forces were far ahead of the general public in the utilization of Negro manpower.
- The United States Navy had indicated a progressive attitude with respect to the integration of Negroes.
- The Air Force had not yet determined its final stand in utilizing the Negro within its organizational framework.
- War Department Circular No. 124, 1946, was a fair, enlightened, and progressive document, providing for the fullest utilization possible in the Army of the Negro permitted by national habits, and his present qualifications. As the Negro improved his status, his utilization in the Army would become more complete.

Summary of The Recommendations.

- That the Secretary of Defense prepare a report for submission to the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board, outlining the need for raising the general health and educational level of the American Negro in order that his maximum utilization in time of national emergency may be realized.

- The present policies (regarding the utilization of Negroes) of each of the three services be continued, subject to such modifications in the future as may be practical based on the rising level of public acceptance of the Negro.
- Segregation in the armed forces must be abolished.

Comment: The issues identified in this study, are the same issues identified in the 1925 Army War College Study. The four major problems were:

- Racism and discrimination
- Poor standard of health, economic status and standard of living.
- Educational deficiencies caused by inequitable educational opportunities.
- The perception by whites that blacks were possessed of undesirable traits of character that disqualified them from leadership positions and as an effective unit in combat.

The ICAF study recognized that segregation had to be abolished and that the Defense Department must involve itself in helping to raise the status of black Americans. The problems identified in the ICAF study significantly exist today. In addition, other problems have developed because no action has been taken to alleviate the previous problems. Those problems will be addressed by another member of this research team.

CONCLUSIONS

The harm done to black America throughout our history has had a devastating effect on the mobilization potential of this significant fraction of the population.

In 1948, President Truman began the integration process. While the process took many years to complete, gone were the racial barriers that had limited the opportunities for black Americans in the military establishment. That is not to say that institutional racism did not continue to exist, but the track was better and the field was smoother.

Integration in the military was the first major step taken by America to ensure the effective use of all its citizens whatever color. However, only part of the problems outlined in studies written more than 40 years ago have ever been corrected. Black health care, poor educational opportunities, substandard living conditions, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, fatherless families, and black on black crime, contribute to lowering the full mobilization potential of black America. The Defense Department must add its considerable voice to those calling for reform.